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**ECONOMIC SANCTIONS ON IRAQ:  
GOING NOWHERE FAST**

BY

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United States Navy**

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**Economic Sanctions on Iraq: Going Nowhere Fast**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This research paper assesses the effectiveness and consequences of the United Nations (UN)-mandated economic sanctions on Iraq. It begins by noting the increasingly widespread use of sanctions as an instrument of power and evaluating the difficulties associated with sanctions, such as political acceptability, unintended consequences and enforcement. These difficulties are then discussed as they specifically apply to the sanctions on Iraq. Those sanctions, in place now for over seven years, have yet to achieve any of their stated objectives. The many reasons for their failure, among them an insulated dictatorial government, growing international sympathy for the suffering Iraqi people and inadequate enforcement are next explored. Finally, some possible alternatives to staying the present course are offered.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

When you discover you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount.

— Dakota Tribal Wisdom

Economic sanctions, imposed on Iraq by the UN Security Council in response to that country's invasion of Kuwait and continuing aggressive, threatening policies have been in place for over seven years. They did not meet their initial, pre-hostilities goal of forcing Iraqi forces to withdraw, and likewise have failed to achieve their specified post Gulf War objectives, that include: Iraq agree to destroy all chemical and biological weapons and ballistic missiles with a range of over 150km; Iraq allow UN-supervised inspections of weapons sites; and Iraq establish a fund to compensate for damage caused by Iraqi aggression.<sup>1</sup> The UN and the United States are not making any progress towards lasting stability in Southwest Asia by continuing this ineffective strategy. It is time to change horses.

## **THE PROBLEMS WITH SANCTIONS**

Economic sanctions have become the "weapon of choice"<sup>2</sup> for U.S. policymakers in the 1980s and 1990s. According to the Congressional Research Service, sanctions were imposed by the United States against 79 countries from 1979 to 1992, not including trade restrictions to counter unfair trade practices.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1993 and 1996, the U.S. imposed some kind of economic sanction in "63 instances involving 35 countries" says Sen.

Richard G. Lugar (R-Ind).<sup>4</sup> The U.S. currently maintains a trade embargo, export or import restrictions or other forms of economic sanctions on at least 73 countries for a multitude of purposes. Not just about such traditional issues as weapons proliferation, the sanctions were mandated by a Congress concerned also about the environment, human rights or religious freedom.<sup>5</sup>

It is easy to understand the proliferation of sanctions' use. Sanctions are seen by many as the only alternative to war. Implementing them supports a "tried everything short of war" argument.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, says Senator Lugar, sanctions "frequently create the illusion of action by substituting for a more decisive action or serving as a palliative for those who demand some action, any action, be taken by the United States against some other country."<sup>7</sup> International economic consultant Paul D. Taylor writes "because sanctions seem an 'easy' response, their costs perceived to be either negligible or well justified by the objectives, they are accepted almost routinely. In many cases the sanctions appear to have been undertaken blithely."<sup>8</sup>

Unilateral sanctions, although frequently employed by the U.S., "Rarely succeed in altering behavior" and "may inflict more harm on the U.S. than on the targeted country," states Senator Lugar, echoing a view widely shared by academic analysts and trade specialists. Former U.S. trade representative Carla A.

Hills bluntly asserts "unilateral sanctions never work. Multilateral sanctions may take a long time . . . but you have a better chance."<sup>9</sup> U.S. unilateral sanctions are also politically less palatable in the international community, reinforcing a growing U.S. reputation as a bully or the world's self-appointed policeman.

Multilateral sanctions, while perhaps more agreeable, present other difficulties. First, they can be a risk to even pursue, in that "failure to get multinational cooperation can send a message of weakness rather than a signal of resolve."<sup>10</sup> Also, multilateral sanctions are harder to implement, requiring international consensus on their ends, ways and means. Different countries have different national interests that may or may not be well served by sanctions (or their specific provisions) against a particular country. Agreement on targeted goods, enforcement mechanisms, duration, objectives, compliance monitoring, etc., can be difficult to achieve. Even if initially agreed upon, the specifics may no longer suit the needs or desires of all the sanctioning countries as conditions change over time.

Because sanctions do take time to even have an opportunity to be effective, they may fail of their own ponderous nature. Some analysts maintain that sanctions are incapable of achieving significant results within the time dimensions associated with foreign policy crises.<sup>11</sup> Few coalitions have the patience,

resolve or resources to continue sanctions indefinitely. As situations change and costs mount, coalitions can fracture or dissolve.

Second, economic sanctions often have many unintended consequences. To begin with, in the words of John Foster Dulles, "They tend to harm the innocent."<sup>12</sup> Sanctions may be aimed at the authorities, but they are aimed through the civilian population.<sup>13</sup> The deprivations wrought by sanctions are suffered by the ordinary citizens of the targeted government's country. Sanctions' goal should be "ending unacceptable activities, not destroying the opponent's society."<sup>14</sup>

Third, other countries, accustomed to free trade with the sanctioned nation, are deprived of a trading partner. Opportunities are lost, debts often unpaid and economies unrealized. This impact on developing countries can be particularly acute.

Fourth, the shortages that exist in sanctioned countries create black markets and invite smuggling and other illegal activity, encouraging criminal elements.

Fifth, the real or perceived suffering of the people in the sanctioned country can develop in that population (and in their sympathizers) an enmity toward their "oppressors" that may last long after the sanctions are lifted and inhibit future international relationships.

Sixth, sanctions can actually strengthen the regime they seek to influence or undermine. Economist Johan Galtung argues that sanctions with severe economic effects could be rendered ineffective by non-economic factors. He coined the phrase "rally-round-the-flag" effect -- arguing that leaders in target nations use economic pain caused by foreign nations to rally their populations around their cause. "Rather than cause political disintegration in the target state," Galtung says, "sanctions actually foster political cohesion." (Especially in regimes that control the media and suppress political opposition.)<sup>15</sup> Greater economic hardship also causes individuals to spend more time on daily survival and less on political activity. Additionally, shortages give more life-and-death controlling power to the rulers as they decide who gets rations and subsidies.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, enforcing sanctions can be difficult in that establishing and maintaining an embargo is not as easy as it may seem. Nor is it cheap. Without the assistance (or at least compliance) of the targeted country's neighbors, embargoes are nearly impossible. But even with neighboring states' help, smugglers and profiteers are often able to supply those who can afford it (typically the ruling elite) with whatever they desire, making them unresponsive to sanctions' objectives. Continual air and sea patrols to guard against forbidden imports or exports must be maintained at no small expense to the sanctioning

countries. Additionally, sanction enforcement can place the forces so assigned at risk in potentially dangerous activity given the large profits at stake. Historically, sanctioning countries haven't had the political will to use the necessary muscle to enforce a naval embargo. The UN embargo on Rhodesia enforced by Great Britain in the mid-1960s proved ineffective and was discontinued for this failure.<sup>17</sup>

### **SANCTIONS ON IRAQ**

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. In almost immediate response to this aggression, the UN, under U.S. leadership, imposed on Iraq economic sanctions. Those sanctions, with small modifications, still exist today, over seven years later.

Essentially, the UN-imposed sanctions consist of bans on all trade and financial transactions, except for imports of foodstuffs, medicines and humanitarian goods. For the most part, they are enforced by a combination of moral suasion (cooperation among UN member nations to back approved resolutions) and physical restraint (patrolled no-fly zones over Iraqi borders and a naval blockade of Iraq's only access to the sea in the Arabian Gulf). UN Security Council Resolution 661, adopted August 6, 1990, required that all member states prevent "the import . . . of [goods] . . . originating in Iraq or Kuwait, or exports to those countries of any goods except medical supplies and in humanitarian circumstances, foodstuffs."<sup>18</sup> Initially, the

sanctions' goal was to compel the Iraqi government to comply with the previous Resolution, 660, which required Iraq to "immediately, completely and unconditionally" withdraw their troops from Kuwait (to the positions in which they were located on August 1, 1990). The sanctions, despite high hopes in many quarters, were not successful in rapidly achieving this. Armed force was necessary.

After the Gulf War, Resolution 687 laid down specific terms for ending the sanctions, and it was expected then that Iraq would expeditiously move to fulfill these conditions. But this expectation, too, has not been met.<sup>19</sup>

Just what have the sanctions achieved over the last seven years? One often-reported result is the deprivations suffered by Iraq's 23 million people. They are extensive. Within Iraq, Gross Domestic Product has been reduced to less than a quarter of its 1989 level, and is lower now than it was in 1962, when the country's population was only 7 million.<sup>20</sup> Per capita income has collapsed from \$8,000 to \$500.<sup>21</sup> Iraq, formerly a promising middle class nation, is now, according to the UN, a country with a third of its population living in abject poverty.<sup>22</sup> With climatic extremes that make only three percent of the total land area useful for cultivation,<sup>23</sup> Iraq cannot feed its current population without its oil revenues. Food consumption for the average Iraqi has decreased from 3,000 to just over 2,000 calories per day since the decade began.<sup>24</sup> While still above the

generally recognized "starvation level" of 1,800 calories per day, the average does not reflect the unequal distribution among the peoples of Iraq. Many Iraqis, particularly those not in Saddam Hussein's minority Sunni Moslem power base, are not availed of government food rationing and eat much less. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization says Iraqis are in the throes of "massive deprivation, chronic hunger and endemic malnutrition for the vast majority of the population . . . commonly recognized as pre-famine indicators."<sup>25</sup> UN Children's Fund teams, traveling with Iraqi officials and UN observers, have found 11 percent of Iraqi children are wasting due to long-term malnutrition, and an estimated 30 percent are stunted.<sup>26</sup> UN experts go on to say that at least 200,000 children may have already died since the Gulf War, mostly from malnutrition, infectious diseases and dehydration due to diarrhea. Many suffer from a lack of adequate medical care. Official sources in Iraq say an estimated 400,000 people have died because only one-tenth of needed medical supplies is actually arriving in the country.<sup>27</sup> People are reportedly so desperate for money that they yank the windows out of their apartments to barter for food. In parts of the country, a liter of clean drinking water is triple the price of gasoline.<sup>28</sup> Numerous "quality of life" goods are not readily available in Iraq because they are on the "red list" of prohibited imports. Light bulbs, socks, wristwatches, ovens, vehicle parts, sewing machines, needles, mirrors, textiles and

refrigerators are all banned imports and in short supply. There is little or no anesthesia in the hospitals, because nitrate is also on the "red list."<sup>29</sup>

Since 1991, with sanctions in force, Iraqi inflation has soared, industrial and agricultural production have declined, crime has become widespread with corruption almost institutionalized, and the middle class, created by Iraq's industrialized state, has almost disappeared.<sup>30</sup> The Gulf War left Iraq with \$190 billion in bombed out manufacturing facilities, most major highways, bridges, refineries and electric power stations.<sup>31</sup> A previously thriving agriculture is collapsing due to shortages in fertilizer, pesticides, seed and farm machinery spare parts (all items banned from import).<sup>32</sup> Iraqi schools have no paper, pencils or textbooks (1 in every 5 students has dropped out<sup>33</sup> -- further lowering the Iraqi literacy rate which, at 11 percent, is by far the lowest among major middle eastern nations).<sup>34</sup>

The Iraqi dinar has virtually collapsed, as shortages caused by the blockade quickly triggered acute inflation,<sup>35</sup> measured at 5,000 percent over a five-year period<sup>36</sup> since the Gulf War. Ironically, the U.S. dollar is now the stable currency of choice in Iraq.

Greater economic hardship also encourages criminal activity. Crime is so widespread that as early as 1992, the Iraqi government decided to treat car theft, price gouging and other

economic violations as capital offenses. In July 1992, 42 merchants were executed for price gouging.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, despite a collapsed economy as a result of two successive wars, Iraq has been put in a "straightjacket embargo"<sup>38</sup> that is making life, for most Iraqis, miserable.

### WHY THE SANCTIONS HAVE FAILED

For a number of reasons, the sanctions have not succeeded in persuading Iraq to abide by the requirements of Resolution 687. The principal reasons are:

1. No Pressure on the Iraqi Dictatorship; Economically, Morally or Domestically. Economic sanctions depend upon particular assumptions about the relationship between economic conditions and political behavior.<sup>39</sup> Such assumptions in the case of Iraq appear flawed. The government of Saddam Hussein suffers little or no deprivation. There is considerable evidence that Baghdad maintains a supply of essentials for the ruling elite using truck convoys through Jordan.<sup>40</sup> Special shops exist for high officials with goods at heavily subsidized prices.<sup>41</sup> The ruling class' standard of living is simply not affected. In fact, much of the country's leadership is profiting from the sanctions, a situation entirely contrary to the sanctions' aims. The regime is criminalizing itself in order to exploit the sanctions crisis inside Iraq to its own advantage.<sup>42</sup> The elites and criminal elements benefit most from skyrocketing inflation;

they control black markets and become more powerful.<sup>43</sup> One senior State Department official precisely summarized the situation saying, "When the government, the elite and the black marketeers are one and the same, the ones that we really want to hurt do well and the common people get hurt."<sup>44</sup> According to former Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, "The economic pressure from sanctions does not affect him [Saddam] directly; they squeeze the Iraqi people, and Saddam has shown himself to be impervious to the suffering of others, working actively and brutally to preempt threats against him."<sup>45</sup>

The sanctions bring little apparent moral pressure as Saddam Hussein seems unmoved by the plight of his countrymen. His hard-heartedness seems borne out by the fact that since the Gulf War, the Iraqi leader has spent \$2 billion building 39 new palaces and VIP facilities, while decrying the embargo as causing widespread malnutrition and disease. The largest of the new structures is five times bigger than the White House, and another four-residence complex is larger than the Palace of Versailles.<sup>46</sup> In the eyes of Bill Richardson, U.S. Ambassador to the UN, "Saddam continues to hoard and stockpile food and medicine for his military and regime supporters while drastically reducing programs of humanitarian assistance for his own people. The result is that today the people of Iraq rely almost exclusively on the UN for their food and medicine."<sup>47</sup> Patrick Tyler, a New York Times reporter, concludes, "If [Saddam's] last weapon is the

sacrifice of millions of Iraqis to the horrors of starvation and disease until the Western alliance is shocked into saying "Enough!" and relaxing the sanctions, then Mr. Hussein will not hesitate to reach for this weapon."<sup>48</sup>

Secretary Aspin also postulated that "what will compel Saddam to switch course is a threat to his political survival.

Sanctions might, but are unlikely to, produce such a threat."<sup>49</sup>

His analysis seems accurate as hopes for Iraqi domestic political pressure on the current regime are fading. Despite "ample evidence in Iraq that a significant minority or even majority of civilians do not support their government and have tried to overthrow it,"<sup>50</sup> the Iraqi middle class, potentially the most politically active, is drying up. With industrial production in decline, many of them have lost their jobs and are either working at basic survival or attempting to flee the country. Emigration is the one safety valve of the middle class, an option that quite a number have taken or are trying to take.<sup>51</sup> According to one Iraqi exile, "People are busy looking for their bread. They are out on the street selling their furniture, their books. They don't think of politics."<sup>52</sup> To discourage any insurrection and further strengthen his position, Saddam has taken several proactive measures: he protected his essential supporters in the security and intelligence services by preferential economic treatment,<sup>53</sup> and he instituted secondary embargoes to divert available electricity, food and other consumer goods to his

supporters, primarily Sunni Moslems, while punishing Kurdish and Shia populations by denying them goods and services.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Saddam is simultaneously punishing his enemies while protecting his political base. (UN decisionmakers who imposed sanctions did not anticipate this.)<sup>55</sup> Taking care of his most powerful and influential citizens has proven an effective strategy, as echoed by Patrick Clawson in *U.S. Strategic Assessment 1996* who states that "they [sanctions] have been least successful in promoting the fall of regimes or the overthrow of dictators, in part because the elites who could engineer a coup are well insulated from the hardship that sanctions create."<sup>56</sup> Finally, Saddam Hussein has fully engaged his "organized, extensive security apparatus to detect and eliminate dissent."<sup>57</sup> Several years ago Eric Rouleau, a former French ambassador to Turkey and Tunisia, acknowledged in an article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine that, despite the pressure of sanctions, "It is widely agreed, even among Iraqi opposition, that Saddam Hussein's regime is more secure in 1995 than it was in 1991."<sup>58</sup> George Joffe, writing for *Jane's Intelligence Review* agrees, concluding that "despite the worsening economic situation, Saddam Hussein's regime seems firmly ensconced in power."<sup>59</sup>

2. "Rally-Round-the-Flag" Effect. The Iraqi government has tried hard to direct the peoples' anger against the West. Iraqi propaganda constantly repeats that sanctions were designed to get Iraq out of Kuwait, so the sanctions accomplished their announced

purpose and are now being maintained only to make Iraqis suffer.

This propaganda campaign "seems to have had some success."<sup>60</sup> A senior U.S. military officer well acquainted with the situation agrees, asserting that Saddam Hussein's ability to blame the U.S. for his country's troubles, and arouse in his people considerable righteous indignation, is the biggest reason, in his opinion, that sanctions are not having their intended effect.<sup>61</sup>

3. Growing Dissension in the Coalition. As the years go by, and the sanctions fail to modify the behavior of the Iraqi government, produce suffering among the Iraqi people and cause missed business opportunities, some coalition partners become understandably impatient. Beginning in May 1994, Russia and France, two UN Security Council members keen to resume trade with Iraq, have openly called for the sanctions to be lifted. They are supported by China "which has always been uncomfortable with the sanctions regime."<sup>62</sup> Besides their frustration with the sanctions' ineffectiveness and their sympathy for the Iraqi population, they have legitimate fiscal reasons for wanting Iraq open again. Russia and France hold \$9 billion and \$6 billion, respectively, in Iraqi credits (for arms sales, mostly) that are going unpaid.<sup>63</sup> They are not the only countries losing money due to the Iraq sanctions. Yugoslavia's estimated loss in just four years (1991-1995), by upholding Resolution 661 banning trade with Iraq, was \$6 billion, threatening all their earlier positive results in rebuilding their country.<sup>64</sup> Romania, too, stood to

lose \$1.2 billion in trade revenue and \$1.7 billion in debts owed by Iraq.<sup>65</sup> These losses, compared to these developing countries' Gross Domestic Products, are significant and damaging. Even England, long America's staunchest ally in supporting sanctions, has businesses that grow anxious. Having exported \$1.2 billion in goods to Iraq in 1989, British companies "do not want to be left out when commerce resumes."<sup>66</sup>

Iraq is not able to honor its debts with sanctions in place. After initial "sovereignty and dignity" disagreements, Iraq finally acquiesced to Resolutions 706 and 712 which allowed them to sell up to \$2 billion of oil every six months for humanitarian supplies and reparations payments. However, virtually none of this money goes toward pre-war debt reduction. Only \$983 million goes to Iraq; the rest is for reparations payments to Kuwait and other deductions.<sup>67</sup> The war compensation claims against Iraq are estimated at \$100 to \$200 billion. At the current rate, it could take over 30 years to pay them all off.<sup>68</sup>

Many countries see allowing Iraq unrestricted ability to market its abundant oil reserves (which have tripled in recent years to over 100 billion barrels, and are now only second in the Gulf to Saudi Arabia)<sup>69</sup> as the best way to collect their debts. Perhaps to fuel this growing feeling of unrealized economic opportunity, Iraqi authorities have publicly declared that they will consider, indeed encourage, foreign participation in future oil exploration.<sup>70</sup> Two major French oil companies, Elf Aquitaine

and Total, are anxious to obtain concessions in Iraq once sanctions are over.<sup>71</sup>

4. Embargo Leaks. Iraq continues to defy UN resolutions in part because the sanctions have not proven to be enough of a burden. Loopholes abound, and many are permitted. Besides the \$4 billion per year oil-for-food allowance Iraq receives, Jordan is allowed to import Iraqi oil to repay Iraq's debt to Jordan, but is all the while extending new "loans" to Iraq, a transaction that amounts to the same thing as paying Iraq directly for the oil.<sup>72</sup> This arrangement, tacitly approved by the U.S. and UN because of the importance of Jordan's participation in the Arab-Israeli peace process,<sup>73</sup> earns Iraq some \$465 million a year.<sup>74</sup> Another source says that "Jordan is allowing Iraq to shelter funds in the Jordanian central bank" and that Iraqi oil exports to Jordan by truck "are earning \$700-\$800 million per year. Jordan's systematic undermining of the economic sanctions may have been decisive."<sup>75</sup> Iraqi oil may be going to Syria, Turkey and Iran, as well. Additionally, there is evidence that Iraq has sold gold, sulfur, dates, sheep, weapons and machinery abroad, annually earning as much as \$500 million.<sup>76</sup>

Nonetheless, the main thrust of the sanctions has been to limit Iraq's export and sale of oil. Possessing over one-fifth of the world's known oil reserves, modern Iraq has an economy dominated by oil, which, before sanctions, was responsible for 95 percent of all foreign earnings.<sup>77</sup> Enforcing the oil embargo has

not been easy, though. Between political pressures on Iraq's neighbors and a finite piping capacity, Iraq has been limited somewhat in her overland exporting capability. The vast majority of Iraq's pre-war oil exports went by ship out of the Shatt-al-Arab waterway, Iraq's only deep water access to the sea. Formed by the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the Shatt-al-Arab empties out of southern Iraq into the northern Arabian Gulf. To deny Iraq oil exports (and prohibited goods imports) through this major commercial shipping route, the UN established around it a naval blockade. However, this blockade has proven ineffective as smugglers ship Iraqi oil from the Gulf out of the reach of UN warships by using Iranian territorial waters, which are protected under international maritime law. According to senior officials of the U.S. Navy and State Department, Iraq's illegal exports of oil through the coastal waters of the Arabian Gulf jumped 500 percent in 1997. Vice Admiral Thomas Fargo, Commander of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, says he has solid evidence that Iran is helping Iraq smuggle oil. He calls it a "rather sophisticated effort, centrally controlled within Iran," with "protection fees paid to the Iranians that guarantee [the ships] safe passage through territorial waters." He contends that "tankers are smuggling tens of thousands of tons of fuel oil out of Iraq each month."<sup>78</sup>

This collusion is helping to defeat many of the sanctions' goals and introduces several potentially unfavorable consequences to U.S. interests, that include:

- a) The current Iraqi government is able to stay afloat supplemented with the profits from these exports and is often receiving payment, not in currency, but in useful but prohibited items, such as electronic equipment and chemicals from India;<sup>79</sup>
- b) The Iranian government is making significant profits by collecting this tribute; profits that are likely going towards Iranian military enlargement and improvement;
- c) This economic alliance may pave the way for future collaborations against the U.S. or UN between the belligerent states of Iraq and Iran;
- d) Much of the profit from this operation goes into the pockets of the blockade runners made up of "unsavory" societal elements like smugglers, black marketeers and drug runners; and
- e) The UN and Iranian warships in the northern Gulf, being at cross purposes regarding the oil carriers, may come to armed conflict over their interdiction/protection. Several incidents have already occurred. In January 1997, the guided-missile frigate USS REID was intentionally rammed twice by a tug that had been towing a barge loaded with fuel. In a tense standoff just one week later, an armed Iranian patrol craft circled two U.S. warships while they were boarding and searching an oil smuggler.

5. Changing Rules and Unclear Objectives. Since the sanctions were first imposed by Resolution 661 in August 1990, they and their stated purposes have undergone several changes. They were initially designed to force the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait. After the war, Resolution 687 sought elimination of Iraq's ability to threaten its neighbors by requiring destruction of Iraqi unconventional weapons and long range missiles. Then Resolution 715, ironically dubbed "the mother of all resolutions,"<sup>80</sup> called for permanent monitoring of Iraqi compliance with the provisions of previous resolutions. Not only have the resolutions kept changing, their wording has not always been clear, and has left room for interpretations. For example, what constitutes "full compliance" is not spelled out in Resolution 687.<sup>81</sup> Also, the bi-monthly Iraqi export restrictions review is too open ended and subjective in that sanctions may be reduced or lifted in light of the "policies and practices" of the government of Iraq.<sup>82</sup> Because of ambiguous wording, UN Special Committee officials are engaged in a running debate with Iraqis over a number of issues, including the destruction of dual-use facilities and the identification of weapons suppliers.<sup>83</sup> Is it any wonder that there is some disagreement between Iraq and the coalition, not to mention among coalition partners, regarding the sanctions, their objectives and the requirements for lifting them? One Gulf War assessment asserts that conditions for lifting sanctions should be set out

in a resolution as precisely as possible, and a "sanctions overseer" or other independent agent should be appointed to assess compliance with the resolutions.<sup>84</sup>

Other subsequent Security Council resolutions pertaining to Iraq have also been tied to sanctions, but not explicitly. For example, does Resolution 688, regarding the Iraqi oppression of Kurds and Shiites, apply to lifting sanctions? Some say yes.<sup>85</sup> Even the former UN Secretary-General, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, acknowledged "the objectives for which specific sanctions regimes were imposed have not always been clearly defined. Indeed they sometimes seem to change over time."<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, there exist in the minds of some U.S. leaders sanctions objectives not specifically included in any UN resolutions. In a May 1991 speech, the Deputy National Security Council Advisor, Robert Gates, stated "Saddam is discredited and cannot be redeemed . . . all possible sanctions will be maintained until he is gone."<sup>87</sup> In 1992, President Bush asserted "the American leadership and I remain determined to keep the pressure on Saddam until a new leadership comes to power in Iraq."<sup>88</sup> According to Paul Taylor, the U.S. and Great Britain support an "unspoken conviction that relief should not be considered as long as Saddam Hussein remains in power."<sup>89</sup> Finally, despite President Clinton's assertions that the ouster of Saddam Hussein is not linked to sanctions, his Secretary of State, Madeline Albright stated that "there is virtually nothing,

short of the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, that would persuade the Clinton administration to set time limits on sanctions.”<sup>90</sup>

President Clinton, perhaps recognizing the many mixed messages, felt obliged to clearly articulate his position on Iraqi sanctions to congressional leaders in an August 14, 1996 letter wherein he clearly tied sanctions and their removal to all sorts of Iraqi behavior, not all of which is likewise linked by the UN.

Thus the Iraq situation plainly violates the premise that “sanctions use should include precise goals, how to enforce, and conditions required to lift.”<sup>91</sup> With all of the changing rules, vague requirements, inconsistent objectives and differing rationale surrounding the Iraqi sanctions, it is not a clear and unambiguous message being sent to Saddam Hussein. He has been given room and incentive to maneuver.

6. Saddam Left Without Options. Despite all the sanctions’ pressures, Saddam Hussein has survived. Sanctions proponents “underestimated the Iraqi will to resist. Iraq’s population had been conditioned by severe economic deprivation during the war with Iran, and the government established rationing and other mechanisms to alleviate suffering.”<sup>92</sup> The standard of living in Iraq is now at levels that Americans would find “so intolerable as to lead to revolt.”<sup>93</sup> Yet, it hasn’t.

Should Saddam believe, as he certainly has been given reason to, that his demise is the only way that sanctions on his country will ever be removed, is it any wonder he thumbs his nose at them? In October 1993, he tried a friendly, compliant approach attempting to "work with, rather than against UN demands," but it didn't work.<sup>94</sup> The U.S. and Great Britain again changed the sanctions rules, including new demands to lift the oil embargo.<sup>95</sup> Saddam, perhaps realizing that the sanctions would never go away as long as he was around, reverted to his more hostile self. It seems a reasonable conclusion that "if the removal of Saddam Hussein is the sanctions' true objective, then they are destined to fail."<sup>96</sup>

#### **WHAT, THEN, TO DO?**

If economic sanctions on Iraq in their present form have been such a dismal failure, what can or should be done? Offered here are a few ideas or "fresh horses:"

1. Suspend Sanctions. The first and most obvious option is to lift the ineffective sanctions, a good idea for a host of reasons discussed earlier. There are possible downsides of such action, though. The U.S. and UN could be perceived as weakening in their resolve to control Iraq and the threat it presents, Saddam unchecked could build his military back to its former strength, and the other mid-eastern, oil-producing countries would suffer from the resulting oil glut and price drop.

(Regarding the removal of export restrictions on Iraq, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries members, already producing more oil than required, are concerned.<sup>97</sup> "If [Iraq] began exporting at full capacity, world prices might drop by a third").<sup>98</sup>

Perhaps a wiser policy, one that would mitigate to some extent these possible adverse consequences, would be to "suspend" the sanctions vice abandon them. Apply a time limit to their removal to see how things work out. Thus Saddam would be given a trial period, after which the sanctions would be reviewed for resumption or extended suspension (if he behaved to a clearly specified standard).

2. Positive Incentives. A second option would be to pursue a reward-based strategy. Use economic incentives (critics would doubtless call them "bribes") to get Iraq to behave as we would like. This approach need not be employed exclusively; it could be used to supplement other efforts. Certainly this strategy would be more effective if applied to a country with whom we do not have such a violent and adversarial recent past, but it might be an ideal plan for dealing with the new Iraqi government when Saddam Hussein finally does depart.

3. Tariffs. A third idea is to take a strictly economic approach and tax all Iraqi exports sufficiently to more rapidly recover war reparations while leaving Iraq too little profit to seriously rebuild its military. Care should be exercised,

though, in devising a compensation scheme so as to not cripple their economy.<sup>99</sup> All imports except arms and military-related goods would be allowed. Although this proposal introduces several issues that would need resolving, (e.g., what rate to charge, how to collect the tariffs, what conditions to put on easing them, etc.), it is a more impartial and objective strategy.

4. Toughen Sanctions. If we consider the threat posed by Iraq so great that we are committed to modifying its government's behavior no matter what the social cost, we could implement "full" sanctions, such as: block Iraq's access to any income from oil sales to Jordan; block or slow Iraqi exports to Turkey and Iran; prohibit Iraqi non-oil exports (dates, minerals, equipment) to Turkey, Jordan and Iran; allow Iraq no access to frozen bank accounts; and restrict assistance from charitable institutions.<sup>100</sup> (Note: The coalition let Iraq off the hook, just when they were most vulnerable, immediately after the war. The Red Cross entered, food donors delivered 3.3 metric tons of food (six months' supply), the UN released \$300 million of frozen assets for humanitarian purchases, Iraq sold gold on the open market, and UN and non-governmental agency personnel spent \$15-\$30 million in Iraqi hotels in the first 12 months after the war.)<sup>101</sup>

To work against authoritarian governments, sanctions must be as merciless as those whom they seek to affect. They must choke

and strangle the adversary to compel him to yield. Of course, the sanctioned country, faced only with options of "yield, starve or fight," might choose the last. (Such a response wouldn't surprise Carl von Clausewitz, who postulated that economic sanctions, rather than being an alternative to war, are themselves an instrument of war.)<sup>102</sup>

However, this option is probably not realistic in today's world. Even if the risk of armed conflict is not great, it is doubtful such a Draconian approach would be attempted. The "civilized" world doesn't have the stomach for the human suffering that could be caused by such a modern-day siege.

5. The Military Solution. A final and much-debated option is to use military force to compel Saddam Hussein to comply with UN resolutions (or to once-and-for-all remove him from power). As events in early 1998 have borne out, the only "pressure" Saddam has yielded to is the use of, or bona-fide threat of, force. Even before the latest U.S. buildup and Iraqi backdown, Patrick Clawson concluded "what little progress that has been made in getting Iraq to comply with UN resolutions may be caused as much or more by threats of force as opposed to sanctions."<sup>103</sup>

The issues, then, become just how much force to use, and if used, what the objectives ought to be. Certainly, fully committed military action (such as in Desert Storm) has a greater potential for achieving an immediate and relatively long-term solution than "softer" action like sanctions, where Iraq's

military and threat capability remain intact. However, as Clausewitz argues, war is not an end, only a means to an end, so a question remains: would an attack on Iraq really end the problem, or just inflame and prolong antagonisms between Iraq and the U.S.?

## **SUMMARY**

The current sanctions policy on Iraq is not working. What little good the sanctions alone have achieved in the way of preventing Iraq from re-arming is more than offset by their many adverse consequences. They have been ineffective in pressuring Saddam Hussein directly and have not fomented any hoped-for domestic rebellion, as "there is little sign that Iraq's bickering opposition parties can mount a serious challenge to the regime."<sup>104</sup> According to Paul Taylor, "One is hard pressed to find an example of a major strategic objective being achieved by economic sanctions . . . alone,"<sup>105</sup> yet this is all we have been doing for most of the last seven years! A different strategy should be employed.

Sanctions were not effective against Iraq, and, except in certain rare circumstances, will likely not work elsewhere either. By reviewing historical data, many analysts say that "we can specify with some clarity the conditions under which sanctions are likely to succeed in changing the behavior of a targeted state."<sup>106</sup> Such an analysis needs to be taken before

"rushing in" to any future sanctions use. This sentiment is well summarized in the following two passages:

Sanctions should not be regarded as an instrument of routine political interaction between nations, but rather as an extraordinary instrument to be adapted only after careful study of all circumstances. In neither the case of Iraq or Yugoslavia did the introduction of sanctions lead to the fulfillment of the goals articulated by the international community. The indiscriminate use of sanctions may help consolidate or even strengthen the power of the targeted nation's leader.<sup>107</sup>

According to senior officials, the proliferating use of economic sanctions as a foreign policy tool is creating regulatory chaos, confusion about objectives, strains in relations with allies and sometimes counterproductive responses -- often without achieving the purpose for which the sanctions were designed.<sup>108</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Paul D. Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions: The Case of Iraq," Strategic Review 23, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 51.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas W. Lippman, "U.S. Rethinking Economic Sanctions: State Dept. Team Weighs Costs, Impact of Trade Restrictions," Washington Post, 26 January 1998, sec. A, p 6.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 58.

<sup>4</sup> Lippman, "U.S. Rethinking Economic Sanctions," sec. A, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Clawson, "Economics," in Strategic Assessment 1996 Instruments of U.S. Power (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1996), 57.

<sup>7</sup> Lippman, "U.S. Rethinking Economic Sanctions," sec. A, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 58.

<sup>9</sup> Lippman, "U.S. Rethinking Economic Sanctions," sec. A, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ivan Eland, "Think Small," The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, (November 1993): 40.

<sup>11</sup> George A. Lopez and David Cortwright, "Sanctions: Do They Work?," The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (November 1993): 15.

<sup>12</sup> Drew Christiansen and Gerard F. Powers, "Unintended Consequences," The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (November 1993): 41.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>14</sup> Eland, "Think Small," 39.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Konovalov, Sergei Oznobistchev, and Dmitri Evstafiev, "Saying Da, Saying Nyet," The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (November 1993): 27.

<sup>17</sup> Adam B. Siegel, "Enforcing Sanctions: A Growth Industry," Naval War College Review (Autumn 1993): 131.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 50.

<sup>19</sup> Clawson, "Economics," 57.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Rouleau, "America's Unyielding Policy Towards Iraq," Foreign Affairs 74 (January/February 1995): 61.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Slavin, "Iraq's Citizens Starving from UN Sanctions," USA Today, 19 November 1997, sec. A, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Economic Assessment: The Gulf States," Jane's Sentinel (1996): Iraq 14.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> George Joffe, "Iraq -- The Sanctions Continue," Jane's Intelligence Review 6, no. 7 (July 1994): 315.

- <sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Sullivan, "Hunger Ravishes Children of Iraq," Harrisburg Patriot-News, 15 February 1998, sec. A, p. 1.
- <sup>27</sup> Joffe, "Iraq -- The Sanctions Continue," 315.
- <sup>28</sup> Barbara Demick, "Iraqis in Exile Tell of Medical Shortages, Corruption," Harrisburg Patriot-News, 17 November 1997, sec. A, p. 5.
- <sup>29</sup> Rouleau, "America's Unyielding Policy Towards Iraq," 63-64.
- <sup>30</sup> Rouleau, "America's Unyielding Policy Towards Iraq," 65.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 61.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 63.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 64.
- <sup>34</sup> Clawson, How Has Saddam Hussein Survived? Economic Sanctions, 1990-1993 (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1993), 29.
- <sup>35</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 52.
- <sup>36</sup> Rouleau, "America's Unyielding Policy Towards Iraq," 65.
- <sup>37</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 53.
- <sup>38</sup> Rouleau, "America's Unyielding Policy Towards Iraq," 62.
- <sup>39</sup> Konovalov, Oznobistchev, and Evstafiev, "Saying Da, Saying Nyet," 26.
- <sup>40</sup> "Economic Assessment: The Gulf States," 11.
- <sup>41</sup> Rouleau, "America's Unyielding Policy Towards Iraq," 64.
- <sup>42</sup> Joffe, "Iraq -- The Sanctions Continue," 315.
- <sup>43</sup> Christiansen and Powers, "Unintended Consequences," 42.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Les Aspin, The Aspin Papers: Sanctions, Diplomacy and the War in the Persian Gulf (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1991), 23.
- <sup>46</sup> "Living Space," The Middle East 244 (April 1995): 11.
- <sup>47</sup> Bill Richardson, "Plight of Iraqis Lies Solely with Saddam," The Harrisburg Patriot-News, 22 February 1998, sec. B, p. 11.
- <sup>48</sup> Clawson, How Has Saddam Survived?, 69.
- <sup>49</sup> Aspin, The Aspin Papers, 23.
- <sup>50</sup> Christiansen and Powers, "Unintended Consequences," 44.
- <sup>51</sup> Clawson, How Has Saddam Survived?, 47.
- <sup>52</sup> Demick, "Iraqis in Exile Tell of Shortages," sec. A, p. 5.
- <sup>53</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 50.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 53.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., 54.
- <sup>56</sup> Clawson, "Economics," 57.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., 15.
- <sup>58</sup> Rouleau, "America's Unyielding Policy Towards Iraq," 68.
- <sup>59</sup> Joffe, "Iraq -- The Sanctions Continue," 314.

- <sup>60</sup> Clawson, How Has Saddam Survived?, 47.
- <sup>61</sup> The ideas in this paragraph are based on remarks made by a speaker participating in the Commandant's Lecture Series.
- <sup>62</sup> Joffe, "Iraq -- The Sanctions Continue," 314.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>64</sup> D.L. Bethlehem, The Kuwait Crisis: Sanctions and Their Economic Consequences (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 806.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>66</sup> Alan George, "Business Pressure on Sanctions," The Middle East 244 (April 1995): 19.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>68</sup> Johnstone, Aftermath of the Gulf War: Assessment of UN Action (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1994), 31.
- <sup>69</sup> Joffe, "Iraq -- The Sanctions Continue," 314.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>72</sup> Clawson, How Has Saddam Survived?, 49.
- <sup>73</sup> Clawson, "Economics," 57.
- <sup>74</sup> Clawson, How Has Saddam Survived?, 49.
- <sup>75</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 55.
- <sup>76</sup> Clawson, How Has Saddam Survived?, 62.
- <sup>77</sup> "Economic Assessment: The Gulf States," 13.
- <sup>78</sup> Mark Yost, "Iran Helps Iraq Beat Oil Embargo: Will U.S. Respond?," Wall Street Journal, 13 February 1997, sec. A, p. 18.
- <sup>79</sup> Crossette, "Illegal Iraqi Oil Shipments Increase," sec. A, p. 8.
- <sup>80</sup> Joffe, "Iraq -- The Sanctions Continue," 314.
- <sup>81</sup> Johnstone, Aftermath of Gulf War, 35.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid., 36.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid., 35.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid., 64.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid., 36.
- <sup>86</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 55.
- <sup>87</sup> Clawson, How has Saddam Survived?, 9.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>89</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 55.
- <sup>90</sup> Joffe, "Iraq -- The Sanctions Continue," 314.
- <sup>91</sup> Konovalov, Oznobistchev, and Evstafiev, "Saying Da, Saying Nyet," 31.
- <sup>92</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 50.
- <sup>93</sup> Clawson, How has Saddam Survived?, 46.
- <sup>94</sup> Joffe, "Iraq -- The Sanctions Continue," 315.
- <sup>95</sup> Rouleau, "America's Unyielding Policy Towards Iraq," 66.

- <sup>96</sup> Konovalov, Oznobistchev, and Evstafiev, "Saying *Da*, Saying *Nyet*," 31.
- <sup>97</sup> Joffe, "Iraq -- The Sanctions Continue," 315.
- <sup>98</sup> "How to Restrain Saddam," The Economist (April 8-14 1995): 15.
- <sup>99</sup> Johnstone, Aftermath of the Gulf War, 64.
- <sup>100</sup> Clawson, How Has Saddam Survived?, 60-61.
- <sup>101</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 56.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.
- <sup>103</sup> Clawson, "Economics," 57.
- <sup>104</sup> "Economic Assessment: The Gulf States," 9.
- <sup>105</sup> Taylor, "Clausewitz on Economic Sanctions," 57.
- <sup>106</sup> Lopez and Cortwright, "Sanctions: Do They Work?," 15.
- <sup>107</sup> Konovalov, Oznobistchev, and Evstafiev, "Saying *Da*, Saying *Nyet*," 31.
- <sup>108</sup> Lippman, "U.S. Rethinking Economic Sanctions," sec. A, p. 6.

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